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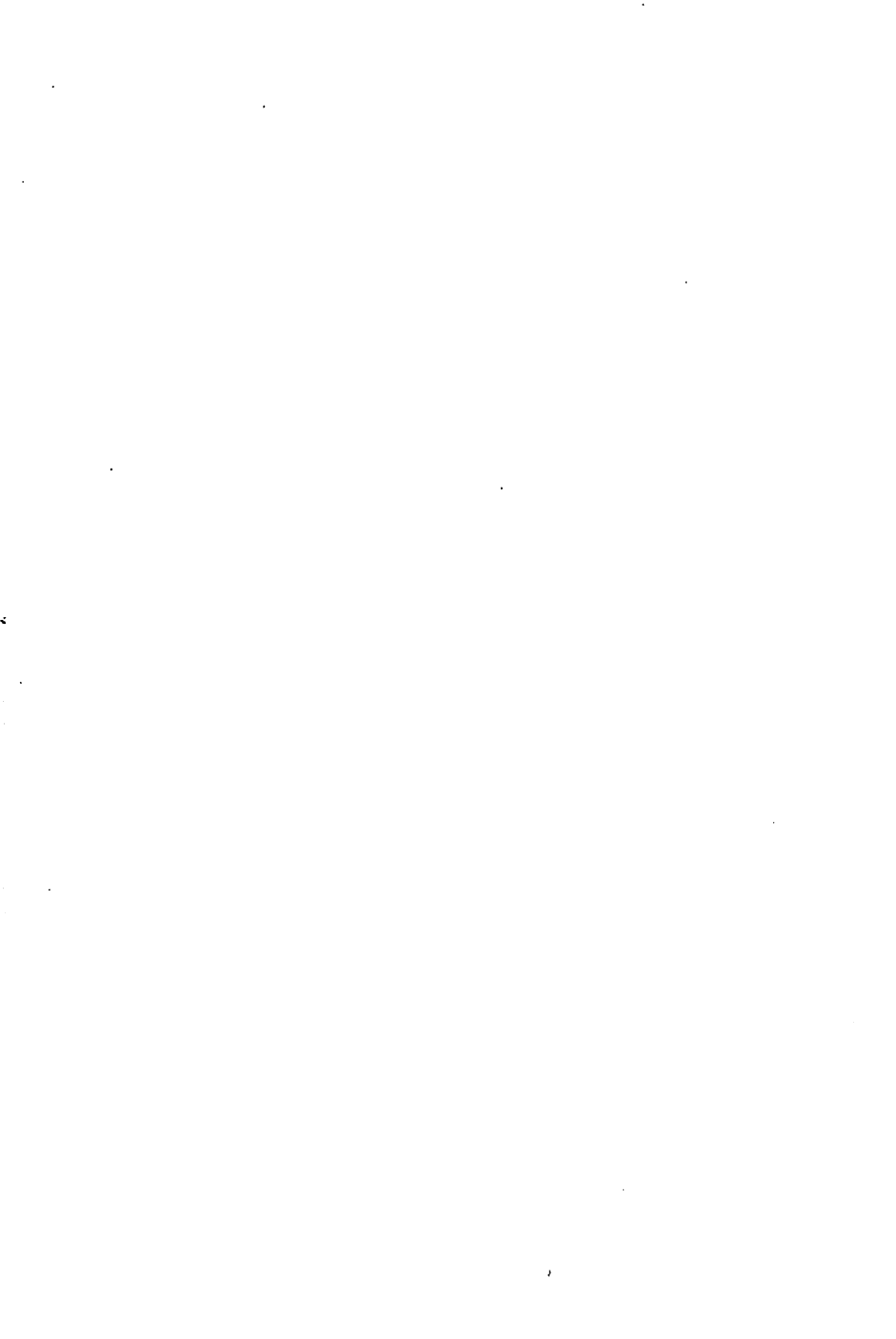
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1938





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THE HEART OF THE
ROAD *and Other Poems*

BY ANNA HEMPSTEAD BRANCH



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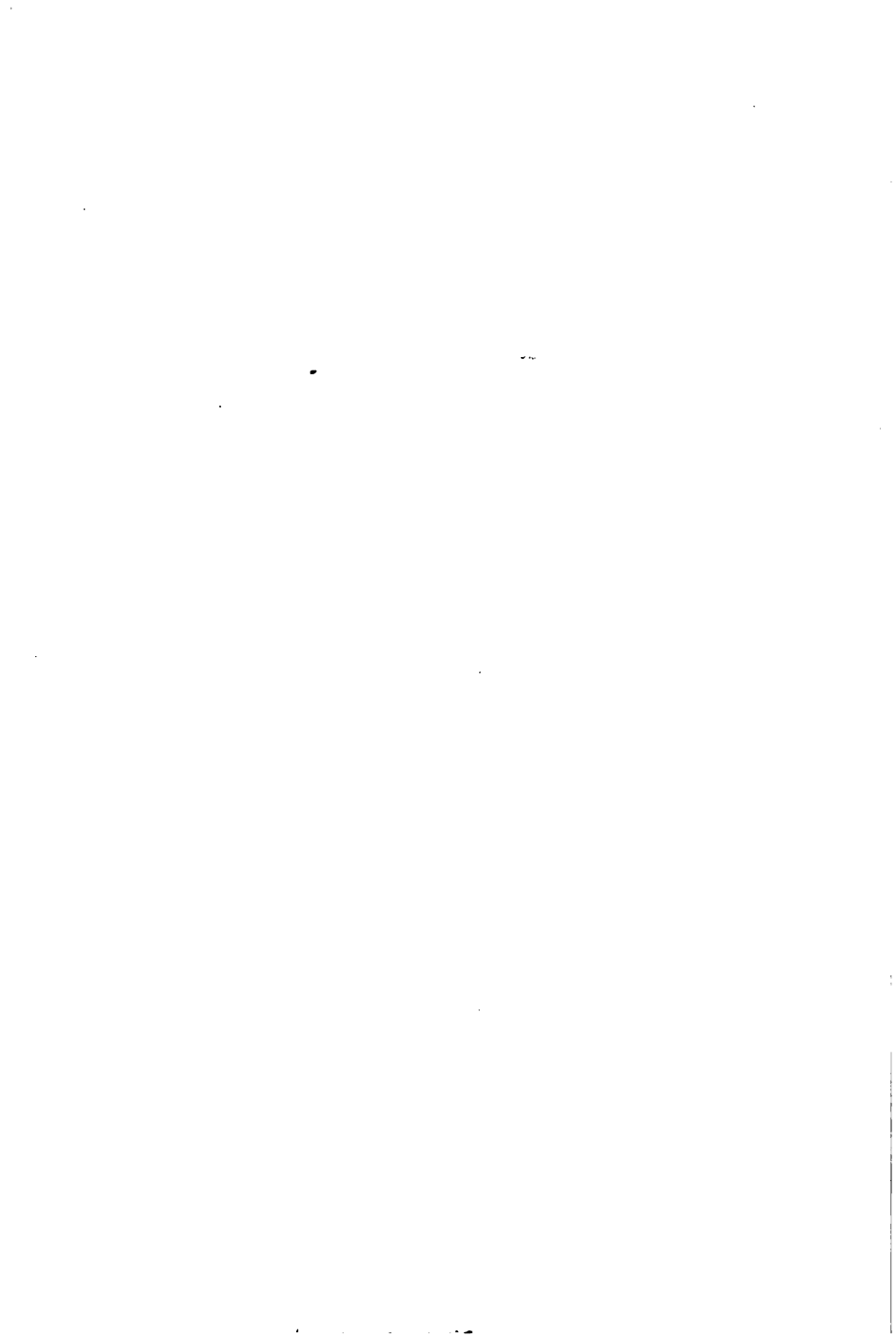
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To
MY MOTHER
AND
FATHER



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THE HEART OF THE ROAD

I JOURNEY on an endless quest,
The eager miles are swift to run,
While up the hill and toward the west
My red leagues travel against the sun.

*Behold, one journeyed in the night,
He sang amid the wind and rain ;
My wet sands gave his feet delight.
When will that traveler come again ?*

Some house them with their kin inside,
Some habit to the ends of earth ;
Strange is the heart of them that bide,
But I was fugitive from birth.

The folk that tarry are not my sons ;
My heart is all for them that roam ;
My thought goes with the wandering ones
That spend the night from home.

The weary folk lead to and fro,
And he is dear that takes no rest ;

2 THE HEART OF THE ROAD

Mine are those feet that come and go,
But, lo, my firstborn was my best !

“ Heart of the Road,” I heard him sing,
“ Whose thought is swift, whose ways are wild,
The mother of my wandering
Shall have the pilgrim for her child.”

How did he find me where I lay,
Remote, untraversed, and forespent ?
How blithe I journey since the day
That he conceived the ways I went !

That day that he fared forth alone
His feet besought me in their need.
I cried out of my dust and stone,
“ Lo, my own breast shall make thee bleed ! ”

I cried out from my rock and steep,
“ My child, I cannot give thee rest ! ”
He moved the stone that grieved my sleep,
And soothed the sharp thorn from my breast.
Therefore my other sons are dear,
But still the firstborn is the best.

My will is in them night and day,
Men and the restless sons of men.

The paths are smooth wherein they stray.
When will that traveler come again ?

Thick as the dust, from unborn years,
I see my coming children throng.
That one who breaks the way with tears
Many shall follow with a song.

Nor bread, nor scrip, nor staff had he
When he went out from the gray town.
Now heavy folk that traverse me
Burdened with wealth go up and down.

Each unto each I hear them call
With idle speech and empty boast,
And I have ease to give them all
Save him that I did love the most.

*But when one passes in the night,
And tarries not by any door,
My leagues beat upward for delight,—
Perchance that traveler comes once more.*

*But when one journeys over me,
Nor staff, nor scrip, through wind and rain,
I reach my dim hands out to see
If those old feet have come again.*

Therefore upon an endless quest
My eager miles are swift to run,
While up the hill and toward the west
My red leagues travel against the sun.

THE THOUGHT OF THE LITTLE BROTHER

MATTHEW, Mark, Luke, and John,
Bless the bed that I lie on.
All night long in bed I lie
With four disciples standing by.

Matthew's clothes shine like the sun ;
He guards me well, and he is one.
Mark is two, and Luke is three,
And dear St. John smiles down on me.

(Brother Berthold that cannot rest,
For the cross of thorns pierced in his breast,
Walks all night with haggard eyes
And " Lord have mercy, mercy ! " cries.)

Crimson and blue and green have they,
But I must go in stuff of gray ;
Blue and green and red and gold,
Their warm robes shut me from the cold.
They all bend over and talk and sing,
And I can tell them everything.

6 THOUGHT OF THE LITTLE BROTHER

Brother Benedictus says
A good child should be filled with praise
From morning-song till even-song,
And holy dreams the whole night long.
For if you dream of Jesus, then
You will be blessed among men.

So at night I shut my eyes
When the dear Lord walks in Paradise,
Saying "Christ, Christ, Christ!" to bring him
near.

If he were little, would he hear?
And would his mother tell him nay
If I should ask him out to play?
If I could dream of Jesus, then
I should be blessed among men!

*But — the thorn has a flower by the old gray wall,
Ursyne throws me her scarlet ball,
The blind priest says, "Did an apple fall?"
I cannot dream of Christ at all!*

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,
Bless the bed that I lie on.

Once Mark leaned down to me and smiled
"The Child Christ dreamed such dreams, dear
child!"

THOUGHT OF THE LITTLE BROTHER 7

Brother Benedictus says
There is no life save only praise ;
He says the poppies red as flame
Grew so to mind me of my shame.
“ It was thy thought that had him die,
Thyself unborn did crucify.”
And then I cannot help but cry —
That let the dear Lord Jesus die.

But Luke had a garment all of red.
He hugged and kissed me, and he said,
“ He loves not that his child should weep,
Sleep, little Brother,” — and I sleep.

Once Ursyne on a cloth of blue
Must stitch, as all girl children do.
She pricked her finger, and the thread
That was so white was turned to red.
The mother would not let her cry,
Nor break the thread and lay it by : —
“ For Christ will love thy work,” she said,
“ And bless it where the blood was shed.”

(Out in the cold Brother Berthold
Walks through the night, so haggard and old ;
If a cock should crow I should hear him call, —
“ Peter and Paul — pray for us all —
Pray for us all ! ”)

8 THOUGHT OF THE LITTLE BROTHER

Brother Benedictus says
That if we walk the paths of praise
We may meet angels there ! I know
For my own self that this is so.

To-day I lost my ball, and where
My eyes might search it was not there.
But since we should give praise for all,
I praised God that I lost my ball.
And then a lovely angel came,
With long green wings and locks of flame.
Out of the grass where I'd searched an hour
He plucked it like a scarlet flower ;
And then I kissed him, and his wings
Drooped round me like dear living things.

Brother Berthold is best of all.
He planted brambles by the wall ;
He scourged himself, and every stone
In his dark cell has blood thereon ;
He blinded his own eyes, that so
He might see angels come and go.
I told him all those blessed things, —
The ball, the kiss, the darling wings.
He cried aloud. " Child, child," said he,
" Would those great wings might comfort me ! "

THOUGHT OF THE LITTLE BROTHER 9

(Out in the cold Brother Berthold
Walks all night so haggard and old.
He beats his breast, with sightless eyes,
And, " Mercy, mercy, mercy !" cries.)

Brother Benedictus says
There is no life save only praise;
And there is not a child too young
To serve Him with a golden tongue.
Be we man or beast or clod,
Praise God — praise God !

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,
Bless the bed that I lie on.

Blue and green and red and gold,
Their warm robes shut me from the cold.

Peter and Paul, pray for us all !
'Twas a bough of ripe quinces hung over the wall !
Mark is two, and Luke is three;
John had a rose, but he gave it to me !

Ursyne's got a gown o' gray —
They let her into the court to play.
(Let me dream of Christ I pray)
I picked her a quince to eat to-day —

THE ROAD 'TWIXT HEAVEN AND HELL

LAST night my lord was not at home —

“Nay ; I was out on moor and fell,”

And thy black horse is frothed with foam,

As thou didst drive him well —

“He galloped all night, till dawn grew white,

On the road 'twixt heaven and hell.”

How does it look along that road ?

“The chasm is steep and sheer,

Slippery for footing and heavily trod,

And the rocks are ragged and drear.

The wind of death blows over the heath

And into the soul like fear.”

What didst thou see along the track ?

“A scurry of leaves wind-tossed,

White like faces thrust out of the black,

Thinned and edged with the frost.

They whirled about till they all went out

Into the night and were lost.”

What was that sound I thought I heard
When I was lain in bed ?
“ Maybe the sullen rock that stirred
Beneath my horse’s tread.
Three times, I say, that rock gave way
And plunged among the dead.”

The first time that the rock gave way,
What was it kept thee back ?
“ ’T was thy soft hand upon the rein
That held me to the track.
Thy face shone white along the night
And laughed out of the black.”

Nay, then, it was no hand of mine,
For I was safe in bed !
“ I swear by God that hand was thine
By which my steed was led,
Else were I lost and a thin ghost
That smokes among the dead !

“ With desolate sighs that way was full,
And I rode there alone.
Sometimes there was a grinning skull
That I mistook for stone,
And every rock my steed’s hoofs struck
Was thin like empty bone.”

The next time that the rock gave way,
What kept thee from the rim ?
“ My struggling steed strove hard for speed ;
He leaped from brim to brim.
To my cold breast my child clung fast ;
I could not fall with him ! ”

Nay, then, it was no child of thine,
For he is not yet born !
“ And had it not been child of mine,
That way had been forlorn.
I held him tight through the dark night,
And even until the morn.

“ The fear that bounded close behind
Was like a lean dog held at bay.
I felt his hot breath on the wind,
And I dared not to stay.
Like a bloodhound that seeks the wound,
He followed all the way.”

The third time that the rock gave way,
What was it helped thee then ?
“ That path that broke before, behind,
Cried out like living men.
And far below, like sluggish snow,
Slow things moved through the fen.

“ The woman running at my side,
Who had a bleeding breast,
Even as a star swings off the tide,
She cleared that chasm deep and wide,
Nor stopped one whit to rest.
We whirled behind ; like the storm-wind
We followed in her quest.

“ I felt her tears blown through my heart,
Cold as a blast of winter rain.
The blood she shed had left me dead,
Had I not eased her pain.
I pressed my kisses on her mouth,
And we sped on again ! ”

That woman running at thy side,
Why should she bleed for thee ?
I had rather that thou last night had died,
Than not be saved by me.
My breast is whole as mine own soul,
And is as fair to see !

“ What then ? dost thou forget that road
All blackened with the storm ?
Hast thou no memory for the goad
That pierced thy hurrying form ?
Thyself for cold cried in the wold ;
Hast thou so soon grown warm ? ”

14 'TWIXT HEAVEN AND HELL

That, in God's truth, my soul went out
 To help thee in that need,
I cannot then keep more in doubt,
 Since thou hast seen me bleed;
But that in the wold I cried for cold
 I have forgot indeed !

If, in God's truth, my spirit went
 To where thy course was set,¹
I have forgotten how I was spent,
 My wounds I do forget ;
But there shall be one memory —
 Thy kiss is on me yet !

Last night my lord was not at home —
 " Nay ; I was out on the moor and fell."
And thy black horse is frothed with foam,
 As thou didst drive him well —
" He galloped all night, till the dawn grew white,
 On the road 'twixt heaven and hell."

THE SHADOW OF A CLOUD

*All day the small cloud floated by
Like a white bird beneath the sun.
There was never a cloud in all the sky
As white as that least one.*

“All day long,” quoth the little gray shadow,
“I climb this hillside green and steep.
The shepherd sings to his flocks all day,
But I am not his to keep.
My ways are wide, though I be gray
As the least wayworn sheep.”

“I dream, I dream,” quoth the little gray shadow,
“And in my dreams there be
A blowing cloak and the breath of a pipe,
And many a one like me.
My shepherd is in my dreams; my ways
Are with his song,” quoth he.

“Along the road o’ the wind and sun
I journey up the mountain-side,

And there are flowers or dust or stone
 In the places where I bide,
 And there is wind in the thick green grass,
 And birds at eventide."

*All day the small cloud floated by
 Like a white lily under the sun.
 There was never a cloud in all the sky
 As white as that least one.*

"I dream, I dream," quoth the little gray shadow,
 "In sooth, I do not know,
 But on those wild wind-hills I see
 A white cloud come and go.
 Like wind in grass amid my dreams
 The stars weave to and fro.

"My heart is strange," quoth the little gray shadow,
 "My thoughts are strange and far.
 The bird in the grass has brushed his wings,
 Sings he, against a star!"
 The shadow i' the grass has leagues to run
 Where the brown earth pastures are.

"I dream, I dream," quoth the little gray shadow,
 That slipped over water and stone.

“ All day I sing to myself in my heart
That I travel or tarry alone,
But the bird in the grass has touched a cloud,
And my ways are not my own ! ”

*All day the small cloud floated by
Alone in the wide space under the sun.
There was never a cloud in all the sky
As white as that least one.*

THE KEEPER OF THE HALFWAY HOUSE

MANY an one has come and bode
But to leave me sorrow.
With the dawn they take the road
And I say " Good morrow."

" Tell us, keeper of the Inn,
Hast thou rest inside ? "
These shall come where those have been,
And not one shall bide.

They will linger for a night
At this hearth of mine,
Stay their souls unto delight
With my bread and wine.

Even he I loved the best
Might not loiter here,
So I sped my parting guest
With abundant cheer.

"Brother, what 's the road," they say,

"We must travel on?"

So I show them up the way

Where I have not gone.

Think of me, all ye that go,

Ye that tarry not!

But up the road a league or so

And lo, they have forgot.

So I do not smile to see

One knocking at the door.

That one in sooth shall fare from me

As they have fared before.

So it is I am content,

Beside a vacant chair.

Long before the day is spent

One will be sitting there.

"Tell us, Keeper of the Inn,

Hast thou rest inside?"

These shall come where those have been

And not one shall bide.

HEART OF MY SONG

HEART of my song — if my own heart
Lies barren for its pain,
And all my thoughts shall beat apart
Over an empty plain,
Thy thoughts like singing birds shall fly
Athwart my falling rain.

Heart of my heart — since God has said
Mine shall not throb alone,
I cannot leave thy wide, deep ways
To which my soul has grown.
Like wind among the leaves thy mood
Is wrought into my own.

I feel no splendor and no might
That gives not thee the praise.
Thy lordly blood has set my own
Into more stately ways.
Thy centuries blow from out my eyes
The thick dust of the days.

Thy thoughts are in my thoughts as sound
Is in the rain, and so
Thy memories are all around,
Whether I will or no.
I have a dream of dawns that broke
Hundreds of years ago.

I have before I yet was born
A thought of those vague years.
Thou who didst breathe in God's first morn,
Who beat in God's first spheres,
Art in my dreams for early light,
And in my heart for tears.

For even as the wind that blows
And sings from star to star,
May help the timid grass that grows,
That cannot fly so far,
Thou dwellest in me with the light
Of all the worlds that are.

Heart of my heart, heart of my song,
Though I go wandering,
Thou laughest in me all day long
Like flowers in the spring.
Thou art not saddened by my tears,
But thou art strong to sing.

ALL YE YOUNG POETS

ALL ye young Poets, crowding up with eyes
Yet wistful with the morning, and who throng
Silently yet with the first love of song
And ways made delicate with your surprise,
On whom the seal and the fair promise lies,
Come up to the broad ways where ye belong
Paven with golden echoings and strong
As stalwart stars set close along the skies.
As surely will ye come from the dim years
As changes, seasons, or as unborn daisies.
We doubt these not, nor ye, who are God's own,
But bid ye welcome to our songless spheres
And watch lest he who most deserves our praises
Shall come forsaken, bleeding and alone.

SONNET IN THE NIGHT

COME gently, Sleep, and let me rest to-night
With no disturbing dream of angel's wings.
Bring no song in thy heart that sings and sings
Like a bird amid thy skies of calm delight.
Oh wake me not with these, but heal my sight
Of inner visions, cure the subtle stings
Of too great pleasure, lull the murmurings
Of thy dear dreams ! Oh, do not shine so bright !
For I would rest and stint myself to thought.
Nay, get thee from my sleep, thou lovely dear !
Why wilt thou gather round me so, enringing ?
And then a voice replies, " His hand has wrought
A sound in thy soul's raiment thou dost hear,
Poor child, that cannot rid thyself of singing."

THE SILENCE OF THE POETS

I BETTER like that shadowed side of things
In which the Poets wrote not; when they went
Unto the fullness of their great content
Like moths into the grass with folded wings.
The silence of the Poets with it brings
The other side of moons, and it is spent
In love, in sorrow, or in wonderment.
After the silence, maybe a bird sings.
I have heard call, as Summer calls the swallow,
A leisure, bidding unto ways serene
To be a child of winds and the blue hazes.
“Dream” — quoth the Dreamer — and ’t is
sweet to follow !
So Keats watched stars rise from his meadows
green,
And Chaucer spent his hours among the daisies.

HAUNTED

I AM distraught with singing. In my brain
I feel a presence ever, and a might
Pursues my soul in flashes of long light
Or soft as throbbing of a golden rain,
Till my whole spirit melts into refrain
And I am wakened even in the night
By delicate visions that beset my sight,
The clinging sweetness of a perfect strain.
I am distraught with singing! Never more
Shall I go with my friends in the old ways.
In other orbits do my paths belong
And other hands will beckon me before.
God sets a wonder upon all my days,
And I am haunted always by a song.

UNTAMED

Who is there that can pipe up buds unblown,
Who is there that can charm the winds that pass,
And who is there can lead the early grass
To press another way than it has grown?
To many another has my spirit flown,
But never has it found that one, alas!
Who could shed himself on everything that was,
Like wind on water, sunshine upon stone.
These are all haunted by so great a might
No other power can tame them. Their vague
 eyes
Are full of dawns and shadows of surprise,
And they are aureoled with their own light.
Grass has its Heaven and the winds their skies.
They wot not of us with their wistful sight.

FORESHADOWED

WHAT? Thou art jealous of my past, while yet
I was unknown to thee, while my first years
Were sweet without thee, and with my own tears,
Not thine, Belovéd, my young eyes were wet?
But I can tell thee that before we met
Thy splendor dropped athwart those golden spheres
Which were my childhood. All my joys and
fears

Were strangely double. I shall not forget
That look I loved so in my mother's eyes.
Her glance I think did so contain thine own
I felt a dim foreshadowing cast on me
And read thy star concealed amid her skies.
I cannot remember that first look alone
Without some reminiscences of thee.

WHERE NO THOUGHTS ARE

WHEN all my will drops from me like a shroud
From the fair dead when they go up on high,
And leaves my soul like sky, blue sky, all sky,
Without a wind or sunshine or the loud
Incessant flitting of the thoughts that crowd
Like swallows to the summer time, then I,
Looking straight upward through myself, descry
A beautiful face more vague than wind or cloud
That from its Heaven searches into mine
And bends to me, even as a star to star.
But if I think, back will the faint clouds roll.
Sometimes I wonder if it be divine —
If that be God, up there where no thoughts are —
Or if I see the face of my own soul.

DIVINITY

My silences are not my own, for lo
Thy speech is in them always ; I abide
In waiting for thee, as the eventide
Expects the dew ; and that thou art, I know,
And what thou art I know not, but I go
Hearing thy voice always, far and wide,
Strange in its bidding, not to be denied,
Deeper than thought, since thou wilt have it so,
For when my thoughts are silent every one,
Like vanished rain, and all my heart is bare
Of any wistful dream that comes and goes,
Thy speech falls on me subtle as the sun,
And I receive thee as the summer air
Is touched with the slow blooming of the rose.

I CANNOT QUITE FORGET

MORTALITY is on me like the sleep
Of one who dreams on banks of pleasant flowers.
I hear the humming of gold-girdled hours
Whirling along the sunshine, feel the deep
And shadowy stillness into which they creep,
Dropping like honeyed bees into their bowers.
Such gracious dreams brings this long sleep of
ours,
Such gracious dreams I know not how to weep.
The world I have forsaken for my dream.
A strange and lingering sweetness haunts me yet,
A visionary presence, and a light
Creeps 'twixt my eyelids, like the slender beam
Piercing the filmy primrose, folded tight,
And wrapped in sleep, I cannot all forget.

SONG OF THE WANDERING DUST

WE are of one kindred, wheresoe'er we be, —
Red upon the highroad or yellow on the plain,
White against the sea drift that girts the heavy
 sea ;
Thou hast made us brothers, God of wind and
 rain !

Yellow all along the fields, hey ho, the morn !
All the throb of those old days lingers in my
 feet,
Pleasant moods of growing grass and young laugh
 of the corn,
And the life of the yellow dust is sweet !

When I bend my head low and listen at the
 ground,
I can hear vague voices that I used to know,
Stirring in dim places, faint and restless sound ;
I remember how it was when the grass began to
 grow !

32 SONG OF THE WANDERING DUST

We are of one kindred, wheresoe'er we be, —
Red upon the highroad or yellow on the plain,
White against the glistening kelp that girts the
 heavy sea ;
Thou hast made us brothers, God of wind and
 rain !

Blown along the sea beach ! Oh, but those were
 days !
How we loved the lightning, straight and keen
 and white !
Bosomed with the ribboned kelp ! Hist ! through
 all the ways
Of my brain I hear the sea, calling through the
 night.

How we used to jostle, braced together each to
 each,
When the sea came booming, stalwart, up the
 strand !
Ridged our shoulders, met the thunder, groaned
 and held the beach !
I thank the God that made me, I am brother to
 the sand !

We are of one kindred, wheresoe'er we be, —
Red upon the highroad or yellow on the plain,

SONG OF THE WANDERING DUST 33

White against the sea drift that girts the heavy
sea ;

Thou hast made us brothers, God of wind and
rain !

Red upon the highroad that travels up to town !
I have nigh forgotten how the old way goes.
Ay, but I was there once, trampled up and down !
Shod feet and bare feet, I was friend to those !

Old feet and young feet, — still within my breast
I can feel the steady march, tread, tread, tread !
In my heart they left their blood, — God give
them rest !
In my bones I feel the dust raised from their
dead !

We are of one kindred, wheresoe'er we be, —
Dumb along the highroad or fashioned in the
brain ;
Once my flesh was beaten from the white sand
by the sea ;
Thou hast made us brothers, God of wind and
rain !

Red dust and yellow dust, whither shall we go ?
Up the road and by the sea and through the
hearts of men !

34 SONG OF THE WANDERING DUST

Red dust and yellow dust, when the great winds
 blow,
We shall meet and mingle, pass and meet again.

Red dust and yellow dust, I can feel them yet,
On my lips and through my soul, fine-grained in
 my mood.
Still the solemn kinship calls, the old loves will
 not forget,
And my heart answers back to its blood.

Old dust and strange dust, wheresoe'er we be, —
Red along the highroad or yellow on the plain,
White against the sea drift that girts the heavy
 sea,
Thou hast made us brothers, God of wind and
 rain !

TO A SONG

WHITHER wouldst thou go, Song ?
Wilt thou away ?
Every flock knows its fold,
Every bird its spray.
Whither wilt thou wander then,
Since thou wilt not stay ?

Thou art like a wind, Song,
Blown from very far
Over meadows thick with grass
Where soft whisperings are,
With the pale light on thee still
Shed from many a star.

Over hill and over wold
Whence didst thou blow ?
Whither wilt thou hurry, Song ?
Dost thou know ?
Nay, I will not ask thee then —
Pilgrim in the world of men,
Weary ones and slow —
Thou art sweet, and like the wind
Thou must come and go.

AN UNBELIEVER

ALL these on whom the sacred seal was set,
They could forsake thee while thine eyes were
wet.

Brother, not once have I believed in thee,
Yet having seen I cannot once forget.

I have looked long into those friendly eyes,
And found thee dreaming, fragile and unwise.
Brother, not once have I believed in thee,
Yet have I loved thee for thy gracious lies.

One broke thee with a kiss at eventide,
And he that loved thee well has thrice denied.
Brother, I have no faith in thee at all,
Yet must I seek thy hands, thy feet, thy side.

Behold that John that leaned upon thy breast;
His eyes grew heavy and he needs must rest.
I watched unseen through dark Gethsemane
And might not slumber, for I loved thee best.

Peace thou wilt give to them of troubled mind
Bread to the hungry, spittle to the blind.
My heart is broken for my unbelief,
But that thou canst not heal, though thou art
kind.

They asked one day to sit beside thy throne.
I made one prayer, in silence and alone.
Brother, thou knowest my unbelief in thee.
Bear not my sins, for thou must bear thine own.

Even he that grieves thee most "Lord, Lord,"
he saith,
So will I call on thee with my last breath!
Brother, not once have I believed in thee.
Yet I am wounded for thee unto death.

THE BALLAD OF A CHILD'S HEART

THE king who dwelt at the old gray hall
A noble lord was he.
He had lands that were broad and treasures from
all,
And his kingdoms they were three,
But he had never a little child
To sit upon his knee.

“Now would that I had a daughter,” he said,
“To do what I should say.
She should have a silver comb for her head
And she should laugh alway !
Broidered raiment and cloth o’ the gold,
And jewels for night and day !”

He rode by dark and he rode by light,
And he rode till the days were three,
Until he came to Fairyland,
Where the little lost children be,
And there he got him a fair girl-child
To sit upon his knee.

THE BALLAD OF A CHILD'S HEART 39

They took off her little gown of green
And dressed her in all that was rare.
A silken girdle did bind her waist
And a golden zone her hair.
Gold on the bosom and gold on the hem
Of the robe they made her wear.

They gave her a falcon for all her own
And a milk-white steed to ride,
And they let her sit on a shining throne,
With jewels on it for pride.
But whenever she sat and whenever she rode
The king was at her side.

He built her a tower where she might sit
Like a dove that rests its wing.
He brought her a lute, but she would not play,
And a harp but she would not sing.
She sat all day with a dream in her eyes
Nor laughed at anything.

"Now what wouldst thou have, my fair girl-child,
Now what wouldst thou have?" quoth he,
"For art thou not mine own little one
That sittest upon my knee?
And what thou wishest that shalt thou have,
For my kingdoms they are three."

40 THE BALLAD OF A CHILD'S HEART

"I have jewels to see them shine," she said,
"And a golden zone for my hair,
And why I am sorry I do not know,
Nor, if I knew, should I care.
But I wish that I had the little green gown
That once I used to wear."

"Now dry thine eyes, my fair girl-child,
Now dry thine eyes," he said,
"For I rode all day and I rode all night
Till my good steed dropped dead.
But I have brought thee that little green gown
With its merry tassels of red."

She was silent at morn and silent at noon
With a dream in her eyes alway,
And her sleep at night was touched with tears
Because she had cried all day,
And she wished that she had the little gold ball
With which she used to play.

"Now dry thine eyes, my fair girl-child,
Now dry thine eyes," quoth he,
"And I will get thee that little gold ball,
For my kingdoms they are three,
And all that I have in my heart and hold
Is not too good for thee."

THE BALLAD OF A CHILD'S HEART 41

She was silent at noon and silent at eve,
But he did not understand.

"Say, why dost thou drop the silken leash
Of the falcon from thy hand?"

"I would that I had my heart," quoth she,
"That I left in Fairyland."

"That thou shalt have, my fair girl-child,
For my kingdoms they are three.
But how shall I tell which heart is thine
Among so many as be?"

"The tears I have shed are in it," she said,
"And my mother's memory."

"It is not enough, my fair girl-child,
Is there no other thing?
All have had mothers and all have had tears,
And which heart shall I bring?"
"Under the laughter and under the tears
Is my love for the Fairy King."

"But where shall I find thy heart?" he said.
"Child, tell me where it is,
For I will have it, if steel be true,
So make no mysteries."
"It is only the king that can tell thee that,
For I left it deep in his."

42 THE BALLAD OF A CHILD'S HEART

He rode all day and he rode all night
Till the bright walls he could see.
"O king, I have come for the heart of a child,
From thine own heart," quoth he.
"And I will have it, while steel is true
And my kingdoms they are three."

They fought all day and they fought all night
In the land where all is fair.
But the strange king saw it not nor felt
The sweet touch of the air.
An he had this, he had brought the child
And left her always there.

"Now God thee save," cried the Fairy Knight,
"That thou couldst do this sin!
Thou shalt wipe my blood from thy good steel
With a wish that it had not been.
Thou hast pierced my heart," he cried, "and so
The heart of the child within."

He rode all day and he rode all night,
And the first that met him cried,
"Thy child's own falcon flew away
This day at eventide."
And the next one said, "Thy child's white
hound
Upon this night hath died."

THE BALLAD OF A CHILD'S HEART 43

The third that met him was pale with fear,
And never a word he said.
But the great king spoke as it were news,
"My fair girl-child is dead."
And they showed her asleep in her little green
 gown
With its merry tassels of red.

The old gray king speaks never a word.
He sits in a silent hall.
He has lands that are broad and kingdoms three,
And treasures from them all.
But he sits all day with a dream in his eyes
And plays with a golden ball.

THE BLOOMING OF THE ROSE

WHAT is it like, to be a rose ?

Old Roses, softly, "Try and see."

Nay, I will tarry. Let me be
In my green peacefulness and smile.
I will stay here and dream awhile.
'T is well for little buds to dream,
Dream — dream — who knows —
Say, is it good to be a rose ?
Old roses, tell me ! Is it good ?

Old Roses, very softly, "Good."

I am afraid to be a rose !
This little sphere wherein I wait,
Curled up and small and delicate,
Lies in a twilight of pure green,
Wherein are dreams of night and morn
And the sweet stillness of a world
Where all things are that are unborn.

Old Roses, "Better to be born."

I cannot be a bud for long.
My sheath is like a heart full blown,
And I, the silence of a song
Withdrawn into that heart alone,
Well knowing that it shall be sung.
Outside the great world comes and goes —
I think I doubt, to be a rose —

Old Roses, "Doubt? To be a Rose!"

THE DANCE OF ALL DEAD BONES

God rest us all that linger here !
He has bleached us white with the rains of the
year,
But this is the night of all good cheer,
Glory Hallelujah !
He fashioned a thing of dust one day,
He blew with the wind of His mouth, they say,
He blessed the fire but cursed the clay,
Hallelujah Amen !

Ribs of the old earth, wracked and rent !
When all her loveliness is spent
And she cannot tell which way it went —
Glory Hallelujah ! —
And she is left as thin and pale,
Empty, like us, and white and frail,
She will dance and crackle along the gale,
Hallelujah Amen !

Their souls dropped off like rain from stone,
And whither they ran to, all alone,

THE DANCE OF ALL DEAD BONES 47

We cannot tell, for we are but bone,
 Glory Hallelujah !
Their wild hearts flickered away like flame,
They left us naked and fit for shame,
For He made the dust that it bear the blame,
 Hallelujah Amen !

He made us dumb and cold and blind,
Barren and brutish of our kind,
Witless of sun and rain and wind,
 Glory Hallelujah !
When our Lord goes by He goes rough shod,
Yet every stock and turf and sod
Heaves in its place and cries " Praise God,"
 Hallelujah Amen !

Those hearts went up with never a sound,
But we rouse and rattle all around,
Dancing a strange dance under the ground,
 Glory Hallelujah !
We have fed His fire and this atones,
And we bless our God with the stocks and stones,
For this is the Dance of all Dead Bones,
 Hallelujah Amen !

IN THE QUEEN'S GARDEN

QUEEN

WHO was it took my favorite rose —
So small and white none else I ween
Had loved her in her world of green
Save winds and all young things that be
As sweet and fine and small as she —
Prithee, who was it took my rose ?

FIRST MAID

Mayhap the little page ? —
I found him crying at the door
Because an hour or so before
He ran ere yet the grass was dry
Into the garden, and the dew
Had spoiled the buckle on his shoe.

QUEEN

Nay, 't was not the little page ;
A child had never thought, I know,
To look into the grass so low ;
A boy laughs and by he goes,
'T was not the page that took my rose.

NEXT MAID

It was the fool, I guess !
I'll scold him for his wantonness.
"Merry men all," I heard him sing
'Twixt his strange bits of chattering,
"Let's get flowers, though cold wind blows" —
The fool, dear lady, took your rose.

QUEEN

No, not he ! Fools look more high.
He would have sought the red one there.
Look you, it grows as tall as — I !
That little world all green and cool
Wherein my white rose sat alway,
Had he seen that, and her, I say
The fool no longer were a fool.
Who was that thief who liked my rose ?

THIRD MAID

The Prince, do you suppose ?
He gave me — no — I think 't would be
Like him to choose a rose, and he —
Last night I saw him with a rose !

QUEEN

Oh ! You saw him, did you, then ?
It was no page, no fool, I know,

Who passed that red one, proud and tall ;
Only a prince's heart, I trow,
Would love my white rose best of all.
You guessed him, you ? You saw him, then ?
Roses and vandals, girls and men !
Look, look you, sweet, the Prince is near !
And I am gracious, and I ween
He looks to find a loiterer here.
I'll bid him to my garden, dear,
To take her white rose from the queen.

BEFORE THE FAIR

FROM the crow of the cock to the shut of the day
I toiled most of any ;
The cow and the flock and the load of hay
From my few pence took many ;
I worked all day in the sweat of my brow,
And only saved a penny.

Here's a penny for my pretty,
Sally needs an airing ;
She shall put a ribbon on
And go to get a fairing !

Sally my girl so light she trips,
And she laughs right out for glee ;
And her warm lips are such red, red lips,
And I won't be by to see —
But I'll get a promise from Sally my girl,
That she'll kiss no lad but me.

Here's a penny for my pretty,
Sally needs an airing ;
She shall put a ribbon on
And go to get a fairing !

Her crimson stocking is drawn so tight,
Her ankle is plump and fair;
She 'll lead the dance till the drop o' night
With a posy in her hair.
And I can think as I turn my plough,
My girl is the blithest there.

Here's a penny for my pretty,
Sally needs an airing;
She shall put a ribbon on
And go to get a fairing!

LAZARUS

A WOMAN

BUT let him tell us ! Peace, you idle ones,
You talk him speechless who is full of news.
Lazarus, speak !

THE CROWD

Ay, speak ! What is it like ?
Is it terrible to die ? Were you afraid ?

A BOY

My grandmother died. She sobbed and shook and
groaned
“ Have mercy on us ! ” Then she sweat —

A MOTHER

My child !
Did he go all alone ? O Lazarus, speak !
Did any come for him ? Was he afraid ?

A YOUTH

Is it cold outside the body ? O my house !
I love thee well that art so warm and close !

MARY

Nay! Once I dreamed —

A MAN

Dreamed — dreamed! And so did I!
I flitted naked through a wasting wind.
Come, Lazarus, wast thou stricken by that wind?

A WOMAN

Nay — but it is not so! The dead grow chill.
Is it not rather like a searching dew,
Insidious and sweet like stealing balm?

MARY

I dreamed of peaceful waters. They were still
And placid as my own content, and lo
When I must needs divide them with my feet
They flew away like doves.

A MOTHER

Oh, be thou still!
Lazarus, heed them not! Speak thou to me.
I ask thee of my child! What was the road —
And was there comfort for him at the end?
I held him till the last, so he might feel
Some love about him — touched and kissed his
hands.
What after that, O Lazarus, after that?

LAZARUS

I have forgotten, woman. I only know
That having died my clothes are full of life.
If any have a wound let him come near,
And I will give him comfort of my death.

A WOMAN

He smells of the grave! Come back—I am
afraid.

A GIRL

What is the look, the other side of the grave?
Is there laughter, singing, feasting—

A WOMAN

Foolish one!

Do the dead love us? Do they speak of us?
Oh, if they speak of us, what did he say?
Lazarus, tell me, and I will believe!
I will follow Christ! Has he forgiven me?
O Lazarus, Lazarus, wilt thou tell me that?

A MOTHER

Say—has my baby grown? Or is he yet
As I did hold him last? What are his ways?
What prattle has he? Does my child remember?
Ah, had I known thou wast about to die—

A WOMAN

Give word of him, or else thou wert not dead !
Does pity seal thy lips ? Does he forgive ?
Oh, in his soul there is a grievous wound.
There is no love in Heaven to heal that wound.
Had I been there I had balm'd it, being woman,
As God might never do. Didst thou not say
That she that hurt him loved him well ? O
thou !
Thou wert not dead ! For thou couldst not
forget
If he had smiled and said " I do forgive."

LAZARUS

But I was dead and yet I do forget.

CROWD

Let him alone ! Revile him ! He is one
Who having feasted scants his dogs a crumb !

MARY

But ask him not. But lately he has come
From warm and delicate airs, color and song,
And doubtless we are strange to him ; our hearts
Seem chill, and even friendliness a cloud
Against his deep horizons of delight.
Speak softly to him, treat him tenderly,
As one new born.

MARTHA

Let him come home with me.
He has traveled far. And I will give him bread,
Raisins, and honey I was wont to stint.
Oh, often have I cried since thou wert dead
That I had let thee want a little honey
Thou couldst have had — But now thou art
returned
Thou shalt have all. It was so far to come.

MARY

Far? No, not far, I think —

A MAN

But dost thou know?

MARY

Ay! When I keep my thoughts all clean and
large,
Open to sunlight as the roses are,
It lies along the margin of the air
With a soft shining, though I see it not.
I feel it on my lips and so they smile,
And in my vision and it has content,
And all this common atmosphere of earth
Has fragrance in it, wrought into it fair,
And motion and most subtle soft delight.

LAZARUS

How thy scant dreams persuade thee ! But dream
on
And tell thy dreams to them that seek to learn.
For he that dreams has speech to tell them with,
But I — who know —

CROWD

Yes — you who know — speak on !

LAZARUS

Behold I am not asked by these alone.
My eyes have looked on death, and through all
time
I see them gather that are yet to come.
Even now at hand pale lips of ruined kings
Beseech me ere they yield themselves to dust,
“Lazarus, where ?” and suddenly are still.
Mothers whose hearts are broken for a child
Kneel to me, lifting up their empty hands
In everlasting pleading, crying “Where ?”
Delicate damsels that were softly reared,
Docile to mirth and mother tenderness, —
When darkened, they must needs fare forth
alone, —
Shrink to relinquish all their subtle flesh
And seek me wildly, having cried, “Whereto ?”

And these are but the faint drift of a wind
That gathers round me. Oh, that wind is pale
With human faces that blow hurriedly
And cry to me in passing, and flare out
Like lightning in a gale — and still it blows,
The old strange air of them that live and die.
I hear their garments and their speeding feet,
Perilous laughter falling into sighs,
Sorrow that seeks to silence, the great shout
Of them that are triumphant, and the sob
Of him that faints by night! The keen strange
cry

Of woman bearing children, in the hedges
The cooing of doves, the sighing of the blind sod
That feels a greenness, breaking of bird's eggs,
And trembling urgencies of flower and grass —
And a little sparrow flitting to its fall —
Prattle of children, and the household speech
Of them that love each other sharply ended,
The vows of lovers, parting in the even,
And that old strange inherited despair
Of them that must do murder! How they sigh
That have forgotten, and the breaking hearts
Of them that must remember! All these sounds
Beat on me in the everlasting wind
That circles the world and time and Heaven and
Hell,

And still the burden of them is "Wherefore?"
And pale swift faces, whirling rapidly,
Flee from me speechless, having cried "Where-
to"?

THE CROWD

Whereto! O Lazarus, tell us! Tell us where!

LAZARUS

Who has seen Heaven
May pass no speech upon it. I grow dumb
And helpless thinking of it, with no words
But for one only thing, and that the best,
Since that it lured me out of perfect bliss
And Heaven was not strong to keep me from it.

THE CROWD

The Christ! The Christ!

A MAN

I think it was His face
That shone upon thee. If I were dispersed
Into the various ways of sun and dew,
A portion of the slow mood of the soil
And sweet thought of the air, I would return
And, reaching helpless hands out of the dust,
Gathering dimly out of stone and rain,

Would rear myself before Him if His face
But shone upon the world where I abode.

LAZARUS

Nay, not the love and solace of His face.

A WOMAN

What drew thee, then? The way were cold to
come

With no dear smile to lure. What better thing
Bade thee from Paradise?

A MAN

It was His voice!
Ay! Were I feasting with the happy dead
And shouting with great laughter, I would rise,
Forgetting love and cheer for ways forlorn
So that His voice called.

LAZARUS

Nay — not His voice.

A WOMAN

Thou camest all alone? What swayed thee, then,
To seek our sorrow from the blessed dead?

LAZARUS

A great desire led me out alone
From those assured abodes of perfect bliss.

One thing more fair than they, more keen, more
sweet !

And I was swayed before it helplessly,
For the desire of it ; and I rose,
And stepped from those slow æons of delight
And by the way I went came seeking earth,
Seeing before my eyes one only thing —

THE CROWD

What was it, Lazarus ? Let us share that thing !
What was it, brother, thou didst see ?

LAZARUS

A cross.

THOSE WHO GO IN FAIRY SHOON

I

SWEET child, little child, where hast thou been ?
“I have been to Fairyland to see the fairy queen.
Her hair shone like the sun to the girdle she had
on,
And the robe that she wore was of green.”

II

Sweet child, little child, how got you there ?
“Down amid the grasses I found some golden
shoon
Wrought with fine work all about, gold within
and gold without,
And curled at the toe like the thin crescent
moon.

III

“Those who go in fairy shoon need not fear at
all,
If they go at fall o’ dew or with the break of day,
If they search across the plain, up the highroad,
down the lane,
But always will their feet find the way.”

64 THOSE WHO GO IN FAIRY SHOON

IV

But what hadst thou to do in sweet Fairyland,
And what didst thou say to the queen,
Whose hair shines like the sun to the girdle she
has on,
And the robe that she wears is of green ?

V

“ She called me her dear and her own little one,
She took me and she kissed me and she rocked
me on her knee,
She took off her golden crown till her hair came
dropping down,
And she plucked its biggest jewel out for me.”

VI

Sweet child, mine own child, is my breast so cold,
That thou shouldst leave it like a bird that flies
out of the storm ?
“ The sorrows in thy breast make it cold to give
me rest,
But the bosom of the queen is always warm.

VII

“ Seven girls in yellow gowns always come and
go,
Stepping soft like golden rain all about the throne,

THOSE WHO GO IN FAIRY SHOON 65

And if they go in or out, little bells chime all
about,
And they gave me a bell for mine own."

VIII

But what dost thou do in sweet Fairyland,
There where the days are all so long?
"We pleasure and we sing in the palace of the
king,
And thy tears I hear them not for the song."

IX

My tears are not so loud as to hear them through
a song;
It is I who hear them always in my heart.
But those halls, are they not cold, piled of ivory
and gold?
For thou knowest what a little child thou art.

X

"The world is never cold in sweet Fairyland,
But the sun is in the garden all the day,
And the roses always blow and the warm winds
come and go
As thick as cherry blossoms in the May."

XI

But what didst thou see in sweet Fairyland?
Or art thou grown blind with the queen,

66 THOSE WHO GO IN FAIRY SHOON

Whose hair shines like the sun to the girdle she
has on,
And the robe that she wears is of green ?

xii

“ I saw the silver swan that once was a king,
And I played with the dryad in the tree,
But the one I loved the best, prettier than all the
rest,
Was the child that my mother used to be.

xiii

“ I hugged her and I kissed her and I wanted
her for mine,
I told her of my mother, and I tried to bring her
home ;
But she would not leave the queen with her robes
that are of green,
And she ran when I tried to make her come.”

xiv

Didst thou love her so, then ? Talk not of her !
Tell me, in sweet Fairyland what didst thou
hear ?
“ Bird songs and lullabies, like thine own without
the sighs,
And every one I met called me ‘ Dear ’ ! ”

THOSE WHO GO IN FAIRY SHOON 67

xv

Sweet child, mine own child, what shall I do?
I who am thy mother, I would I were the queen
Whose hair shines like the gold to the girdle she
 has on,
And the robe that she wears is of green.

xvi

Sweet child, mine own child, for if I were the
 queen,
Then my bosom were not cold like the wintry
 storm.
Thou wouldst seek it then, and she whom thy
 mother used to be,
For the bosom of the queen is always warm.

xvii

"Thou shalt come to Fairyland. Prithee, wilt
 thou come?
I will lend thee for the day my little golden shoon
Wrought with fine work all about, gold within
 and gold without,
And curled at the toe like the thin crescent
 moon."

xviii

Little child, foolish child, what do I care
Though the toes thereof be curled like the cres-
 cent moon?

68 THOSE WHO GO IN FAIRY SHOON

My poor feet, alas, would stray, I should never
 find the way,
And I cannot wear those little fairy shoon.

XIX

But I will let thee go to dear Fairyland,
I — whose bosom is too cold for to give thee rest !
Thou shalt not remember me, — but the child I
 used to be,
Sweet child, mine own child, wilt thou love her
 best ?

XX

Sweet child, mine own child, wilt thou love her
 best,
Better than the fairy queen whose little one thou
 art ?
But thou shalt not speak of me to the child I
 used to be,
Lest the sound of my tears reach her heart.

XXI

Sweet child, mine own child, get thy golden shoon.
Thou shalt go to Fairyland to see the fairy queen.
Her hair shines like the sun to the girdle she has
 on,
And the robe that she wears is of green.

A NUT SHELL

HERE is a nut shell, cinctured fine
With polished groovings, line upon line,
With the silken sweep of a strange design
And a sculptured fate in its smooth wrought line.
All the mysterious ebb and flow
Of the life that surges into the tree,
The vast indelible history
Of generations of long ago,
Are written here in the polished line
And the master curves of that strange design :
The dream of suns that are yet to shine,
The washing of white rains yet unborn,
The silences of many a morn,
The rugged lightnings that shall rend
The tough old fibres, and the trend
Of tempests, stepping overhead !
Lift in your hand the fragile shell
And feel the long rush and the swell
Course through its silken grooves, — the tone,
And music of a wind unblown.
All the cool glooms of forest trees,
Their reasonings, strivings, mysteries,

Loves, deaths, and immortalities,
Their green dooms and their destinies !

And one small nut shell in my hand
Contains the knowledge of all these !

A VOICE FROM THE OUTLANDS

WHEN wilt thou come, belovéd ? Why wilt thou
always wait ?

Is it so good to tarry, that thou shouldst be so
late ?

The flowers of the quinces like red dawns break
apart,

But the time it took to wake them is like frost
upon my heart.

The battlements of Heaven, are they begirt with
night

That I should fly forsaken like a faint moth
towards the light ?

Past the pale flight of planets the revel waxes
loud,

But my wings, they are grown heavy with the
cold wrack of the cloud.

Are those long aisles so lonely that reach the
whole night through,

And are thy feet grown weary with the full
weight of the dew ?

Mayhap my love is blinded with suns that never
set,
While girls who have forgotten will urge him to
forget.

When wilt thou come, belovéd ? Why wilt thou
be so late ?
The stars drop down the morning and the night
was long to wait.
Come forth to me, belovéd. My voice shall lead
thee here
Even as a smile that follows the shedding of a
tear.

The daughters of the angels, they are more fair
than I,
Their garments are more stately, and the souls of
them more high,
The white folds of their raiment are all en-
wrought with calm,
And the looks of these sweet damsels fall plea-
santly as balm.

Their golden hair all fragrant drops ruddy to their
feet,
And the flower of their laughter blooms bright
along the street.

A VOICE FROM THE OUTLANDS 73

Their lips, made red with singing, bid thee arise
and come,

While mine, grown pale with weeping, are faint
to call thee home.

Yet when they all are singing I would not have
thee mute —

I want thee to be dancing to the high strains of
the flute.

There are girls to lead the measure, there are
feasts all bright with glee,

But those ramparts of pure sunshine have shut
my soul from thee.

When wilt thou come, beloved, why wilt thou be
so late?

My watch has seen the morning, and the night
was long to wait,

Though I have naught to give thee save what I
have of fears,

And sighs that leave no laughter, and feasts that
are of tears.

They say the old life, dearest, is like some slender
tune,

One flute note through the summer of yon great,
golden noon.

74 A VOICE FROM THE OUTLANDS

They say that time shall always like a wind blow
on and on,
And touch thy timeless being with the sweetness
that is gone.

Ye daughters of the angels, smile on your golden
lutes,
Caress my love to laughter, and feed him on ripe
fruits.
Make him cool beds of lilies beside some goodly
stream.
'Tis you who make him slumber, but I will
make him dream.

My love, O my belovéd, why wilt thou always
wait ?
Is it not dark in Paradise, and dost not know 't is
late ?
The shout, the feast, the dancing, will all this
never cease ?
In those white years of Heaven is there no time
for peace ?

Is there no peace ? but always that sunshine of
warm hours !
No dropping of cool twilights like dew among the
flowers,

No closes in those gardens for tarrying awhile,
To dream or to remember, to weep perchance, or
smile ?

Thy love, which was born deathless, white, and
untouched of shame,
Has sandaled me in sunshine and girdled me in
flame.
Thy life shall cling forever around my life, and
be
A blessing on the altar that is kept fair for
thee.

Those daughters of the angels, I am more fair
than they !
I bear thy looks upon me as the proud dawn bears
the day.
Thine eyes, they are my Heaven, through thee I
breathe its breath ;
And if 't is death makes lovely, have I not then
thy death ?

My soul seeks thine, belovéd, as a young girl
seeks her love,
In the fragrance of first morning and the white-
ness of the dove ;

76 A VOICE FROM THE OUTLANDS

Thy world has left forever its lingering breath on
this,
And trembles into nearness like lips grown warm
to kiss.

My world seeks thine, belovéd, as a wounded bird
its nest,
Its heart drips out in scarlet through the red
spheres of the west.
And time shall drop behind it like a small cloud
from the skies
Which hold amid their stillness no breath of cen-
turies.

Thou art mine own, though always those girls
rove to and fro
Who sung thee from the slumber to which I saw
thee go.
It was my hands that made thee all lovely for the
sleep.
They have filled thy mouth with laughter, but I
have seen thee weep.

Though light as from the lilies shines in their gar-
ments' hem,
Those high and stately ladies, I have no care for
them.

The flight of their swift coming is like dawn along
the skies,
But my love still keeps the vision of the old dream
in his eyes.

I will gird up my garments and climb all shod
with pain.
My voice raised high with singing shall pierce
those walls of rain,
And they perchance will whisper, when the feast
is at its height,
“Some wanderer from the outlands is singing
through the night.”

But thou — but thou, beloved — so many things
there be
'Twixt us, as in deep grasses lie the thick blooms
from the tree!
Those songs of old, the lilies, those nights that
haunt me yet!
Those dawns! What I remember, thou canst not
all forget.

But thou — but thou, beloved — nay, I will call
no more.
The keen wind of the morning blows the red
dawn to the door,

78 A VOICE FROM THE OUTLANDS

And thou hast come to seek me, on whom thy
seal is set !

Those dawns I so remember thou canst not all
forget.

AS I SHALL BE

*No look as of my present shame
Is on that brow of thine.
Behold in robes of holy flame
How lovely dost thou shine,
As a high star in dawns afar
Is touched by light divine.*

The look of her untroubled eyes
Has knowledge of the spheres ;
That she may know them and be wise,
I toil among the years.
She could not be so glad, so free,
Were I not doomed to tears.

She may not know what roads are mine,
What bitter paths afar.
Her feet among the lilies shine
As white as any star.
My feet shall bleed to serve their need
And keep them as they are.

My heart cries out uncomforted
From folk that alien be,

.....

“Lo, I have broken with them the bread
I should have kept for thee.
Have spoiled that wine that had been thine
Were there more faith in me!”

Lo, I have broken her bread and made
Her wine of nothing worth.
Now prodigal and sore dismayed
I seek the ends of the earth.
Though I be blind yet must I find
That good she gave at birth.

Strange is her thought of Life-in-Death
That works in me alway.
I know she is that living breath
God breathed into the clay,
And like a gust amid my dust
She blows me all one way.

The burden of our want and stress
Upon my soul is set,
That she may know the blessedness
Of them that do forget.
So the old scars of ancient wars
Are grievous in me yet.

When I went down to Hell the flame
Was blood red in the skies,

But through my piteousness there came
A solace to my eyes.
At the pale dead I smiled and said,
"She sings in Paradise."

So she may smile and never know
The perilous ways I see,
Or how from all my pain and woe
Her soul takes light from me,
Her glory wrought from my frail thought
Shall live incessantly.

Behold in robes of singing flame
How is her soul confessed.
The birds of light that have no name
Are brooding on her breast,
And soft and fair like summer air
Her light has made me blessed.

THE YOUNGEST SON OF HIS FATHER'S HOUSE

THE eldest son of his father's house,
His was the right to have and hold;
He took the chair before the hearth,
And he was master of all the gold.

The second son of his father's house,
He took the wheatfields broad and fair,
He took the meadows beside the brook,
And the white flocks that pastured there.

*" Pipe high — pipe low ! Along the way
From dawn till eve I needs must sing !
Who has a song throughout the day,
He has no need of anything ! "*

The youngest son of his father's house
Had neither gold nor flocks for meed.
He went to the brook at break of day,
And made a pipe out of a reed.

*" Pipe high — pipe low ! Each wind that blows
Is comrade to my wandering.*

*Who has a song wherever he goes,
He has no need of anything ! ”*

His brother's wife threw open the door.
“ Piper, come in for a while,” she said.
“ Thou shalt sit at my hearth since thou art so
poor,
And thou shalt give me a song instead ! ”

Pipe high — pipe low — all over the wold !
“ Lad, wilt thou not come in ? ” asked she.
“ Who has a song, he feels no cold !
My brother's hearth is mine own,” quoth he.

*“ Pipe high — pipe low ! For what care I
Though there be no hearth on the wide gray plain ?
I have set my face to the open sky,
And have cloaked myself in the thick gray rain.”*

Over the hills where the white clouds are,
He piped to the sheep till they needs must come.
They fed in pastures strange and far,
But at fall of night he brought them home.

They followed him, bleating, wherever he led :
He called his brother out to see.

"I have brought thee my flocks for a gift," he
said,

"For thou seest that they are mine," quoth he.

*"Pipe high — pipe low! Wherever I go
The wide grain presses to hear me sing.
Who has a song, though his state be low,
He has no need of anything."*

"Ye have taken my house," he said, "and my
sheep,

But ye had no heart to take me in.

I will give ye my right for your own to keep,

But ye be not my kin.

"To the kind fields my steps are led.

My people rush across the plain.

My bare feet shall not fear to tread

With the cold white feet of the rain.

"My father's house is wherever I pass;

My brothers are each stock and stone;

My mother's bosom in the grass

Yields a sweet slumber to her son.

"Ye are rich in house and flocks," said he,

"Though ye have no heart to take me in.

There was only a reed that was left for me,
And ye be not my kin."

*"Pipe high — pipe low! Though skies be gray,
Who has a song, he needs must roam!
Even though ye call all day, all day,
'Brother, wilt thou come home?'"*

Over the meadows and over the wold,
Up to the hills where the skies begin,
The youngest son of his father's house
Went forth to find his kin.

DREAMS

WHEN dreams are thick in the air,
All at once — like the leaves of a rose,
Blown from a garden that nobody knows :

While in the curve of each sweet thing
A sound unborn is lingering,
Then I catch up my pipes and sing.

But hey ho ! nobody knows
What the wind that scatters the rose,
Nor where the garden whence it blows.

When dreams are thick in the air,
In my eyes and under my feet,
Soft and clinging and white and sweet,

Each one full of the whispering,
The memory of some perfect thing,
Then I catch up my pipes and sing.

Hey ho ! wherever it goes,
Chase the wind that scatters the rose,
Up to the garden whence it blows.

DANIEL BROWN

THE great Lord brought to the making of man
Wind and water and fire and clay.
He made him to love, to hate, to plan,
And bade him live for a day.
He earned his bread by the sweat of his brow
In the spot where the great Lord set him down.
He had a wife, a house, and a cow,
And his name was Daniel Brown.

He worked, reluctantly, I surmise,
Sinned if he must and did right if he could,
He fell in love in moderate wise
With a wife who was not too good.
He liked strong beef at least twice a day,
And porridge at night — so write it down.
Wind and water and fire and clay
Went to the making of Daniel Brown.

The great Lord thumbed in the barren clay,
Touched the dust with a nerve of fire,
Fashioned the waters and winds, they say,
Wrought to His heart's desire.

He hammered and built for a thousand years,
A thousand more He pondered alone!
Light of the eyes and smiles and tears
He broke from the heart of a stone.

He gathered the dust of the ancient days
And the wistful bloom of a coming morn,
For strange is the thought and deep the ways
Ere the soul of a man be born.
“Heart of my heart,” quoth He, “come out!
Thou thought of my thought, go down.
Be thou a man in the world of men,”
Quoth He to Daniel Brown.

Restless out of the night he came,
Piteous, helpless, and vague of mind.
The way of his will was an idle flame
That goes the way of the wind.
The great Lord took no thought for stitches,
Naked and nameless He dropped him down.
But he soon attired himself in breeches,
And went by the name of Daniel Brown.

For forty years he grew merry and fat,
His speech was slow and his chin was double.
He had six children — think of that —
And his good wife never gave him trouble.

His chin was heavy, his eyes were meek,
He went to his work at nine on Monday,
He cheated his neighbors through the week,
And paid the debt to the church on Sunday.

*How goes that thought that hews the stone ?
How fares that dream in the heart of a man ?
The great Lord smiled as He sat alone
And looked at the Thing Himself began.
How goes the thought of Thy heart's desire,
How fares Thy dream ? And the Lord looked
down.*

*That builds in wind and clay and fire,
And works in the flesh of Daniel Brown ?*

*How goes that thought that delves in air,
Through the subtle alleys of sun and rain ?
The heart of a man were bleak and bare
If this should work in vain.
How fare Thy dreams that flit and crowd
And beat in light on the eyes of men ?
Shall these be frail as a little cloud
That shall not come again ?*

But strange are the ways where their feet are
led,
And strange is the drift of the shifting mood.

“And some shall travel,” the great Lord said,
“Through the bitter ways of sweat and blood,”
How goes that thought that works in stone,
How fares that dream? And the Lord looked
down,
Smiled in His heart as He sat alone
And beheld the spirit of Daniel Brown.

Strange are the ways through which they came !
Those angels with fire about their brow,
Silent and sweet in their spheres of flame,
Lived once on porridge — even as thou !
I have no fear at all for him.
With a robe of light and a harp and a crown,
Undazed by the flames of the seraphim,
Stands the shining spirit of Daniel Brown.

THE WATCH-TOWER OF THE SOUL

IN the high watch-tower of the soul
I tarry all day long.
The days flit by like flocks of birds,
But not one has a song.
My soul has found no other soul
To which it does belong.

IN this deep loneliness God set
Each soul as in a shrine.
He bade his virgin she should keep
Her separate light ashine,
While others on strange hearths attend
The flames that are not mine.

When I would speak to them my voice
Falls from me like a star.
It trails their atmospheres, but not
The dim worlds where they are.
Than gulf of time or seas of space
Our souls are set more far.

My soul is girt in secrecies
Like the petals of a rose.

92 THE WATCH-TOWER OF THE SOUL

My breath, which is among them, floats
On every wind that blows.
They are like sleep around a dream
There is no one that knows.

Yet that great wind that blows away
From heart to heart will rove
Across all spirits and bear up
Some fragrances above.
I hear some voices that I know,
Some accents that I love.

I weep because I feel their tears
Blown in my eyes like rain.
My heart is touched by that which is
The faint dew of their pain.
I smile because I see them smile,
And is this all in vain ?

Yet when we smile our looks are strange.
The gladness in their eyes
Like a slow dawn is in my heart,
Like a pale light in the skies.
But why they smile or why they weep,
These things are mysteries.

All night I watch from my high tower
The great world come and go.
Their faces flare along the dark
Like wandering stars below.
But who has seen two stars that touch?
And space has said me no.

Though his sweet presence like a light
Is shed about the place, —
My love, to whom I am most near, —
I have not seen his face.
My tears, which are not his, must drop
To reach his heart, through space.

He smiled and folded my two hands
So close upon his breast.
“*These are my doves,*” he said, “*and so*
A little while shall rest.”
But I, who smiled not, felt them grope
Through space — they found no nest.

He smiled and said, “*Thy cheek shall lie*
In my hand, hollowed so !”
But I, who smiled not, felt all time
A wind betwixt us blow.
I leaned my cheek into a void
Of which he did not know.

A VISION IN THE NIGHT

O PARADISE, depart !
Why bidest thou with me ?
Thy petals sting my face that drop
From off thy Holy Tree.

Thou strange and lovely face
Across my spirit blown,
Oh, get thee hence a little space,
And let my soul alone.

Be still, ye angel's wings
That stir this golden air.
My heart is broken for this world
That God has made too fair.

These wounds of strange delight
I cannot comfort them !
Let me withdraw into some night
Nor touch thy garment's hem.

TO LOVELINESS

O LOVELINESS, that softly glows
Along the blooming of the rose,

That has a heart for darkened things
And over shadows lays its wings,

That loves amid deep grass to rest
And lingers in the ground bird's breast,

That strangely shed upon a stone
Makes it a darling of her own,

That leaves an angel in the hush
And Pentecost upon the sea,
That makes a bard out of a tree,
A temple from a burning bush,

That lifts from out the troubled soil
A smiling face on them that toil,

That has a home in littleness
And with a dear touch will caress
Small pebbles and frail water-cress,

And young bird's down and butterflies !
All these she blesses and will bless !

That mocks us, most elusive fair,
In simple oracles of air,

That in the peace of some still place
With subtle hands will touch my face,

And from the thick leaves of a tree
With haunting eyes will gaze on me,

That silken soft and dream-enwrought
Lends her strange color to a thought,

And fitful, in her own good time,
Lays a scant blessing on a rhyme !
Briefly it flowers and blushes, then
She gets her to her dust again !

Pilgrim art thou and fit to roam !
And yet I know not any home
Save thou art there. Then let me rove
Unhoused like thee, O sweet my love !
No other friend I 'll know nor see
Save only thee and thee and thee,
If only thou wilt hold my hand
The one known thing in this strange land.

SUCH ARE THE SOULS IN PURGATORY

THREE days she wandered forth from me,
Then sought me as of old.
“I did not know how dark ’t would be,”
She sobbed, “nor yet how cold.

“And it is chill for me to fare
Who have not long been dead.
If thou wouldst give away my cloak,
I might go comforted.”

I would have soothed her on my breast,
But that she needs must go.
The dead must journey without rest,
Whether they will or no.

But I had kept for love of her
The cloak she wore, the shoes,
And every day I touched the things
She had been wont to use.

All night the dead must hurry on.
They may not ever sleep.
And so I gave away her cloak
I was so fain to keep.

The second time she sought me out
Her eyes were full of need.
"If thou wouldst give away my shoes
Perchance I should not bleed."

I cried to her aloud, "My child,
They are all I have to keep,
To lay my hand upon and touch
At night before I sleep.

The earth shall keep the body I bore
And Heaven thy soul. I may not choose.
Let be — I ask a little thing,
That I should keep thy shoes.

But I will give away my own.
Lord, Lord, wilt thou not see?
Let thou her road to Paradise
This way be eased by me."

All night alone by brier and stone
I ran that road unshod,

So I might know instead of her
The pains that lead to God.

When next she came for a brief space,
She tarried at my side,
So happy was she in that place,
So glad that she had died.

"The last night that I roamed," she said
"Some one had gone before.
I followed where those feet had led,
And found it rough no more.

"And then I came to a good place,
So kind, so dear are they
I may not come again," and so
She smiled and went away.

Dear Christ, who died to save us all,
Who trod the ways so cold and wild,
The love of Mary in thy heart
Did let me ease my child.

She may not leave that place of bliss,
I may not touch her hands and hair,
But every night I touch and kiss
The shoes she used to wear.

THE PIPER'S MORROW

Up and down and here and there
Went the piper playing,
All he knew to tune his air
And keep the flocks from straying.
“Piper, cease,” and “Piper, cease,”
Quoth the folk with sorrow,
“Labor now and get thee peace
And plenty for the morrow.”

Homeward came the laborers strong,
Heavy harvest bringing,
Up and down and all along
Strayed the piper singing.
Oft the good dame from her door
Watched him thence with sorrow,
But he only sang the more
And minded not the morrow.

Slow the laborers from the plain
Bring their fruits delaying,
And the good wife waits in vain
For an idler's playing.

THE PIPER'S MORROW

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Flocks are wandering on the hill,
Timid with their sorrow,
And the piper, smiling still,
Has gone to meet his morrow.

A KISS AFTER LAPSE OF MEMORY

NAMES, names ! With what elusive wings
A moment poised on their own things
And then away as a bird sings
Above a flower. I have forgot
So many sweets,— and what is this ?
Wait, I remember ! 'T is a —

Nay !

So small a word and flown away !

How softly crowd the smiling faces
That are the names of these dear places !
How swift to bless and bid me bide
So long a pilgrim and outside
This quaint good house of speech. But there —
Oh, the great peace of that strange air
That had no name, yet was so fair !
And nothing in it had a name,
Yet whirling rapidly there came
Like smiles and roses, things of flame,
Blowing, ah whither, whither ? So
Soft presences would come and go
Leaving a preciousness to pain,

Poised round about like light that clings
For aureole to martyred things,
Or that gray loveliness that sings
A comfort to the heart of the rain.
Those were angelic ones. But this —
So earthly warm ! It is a —

Nay !

So small a word and flown away !

O world new-born, that dost arise
Out of a vast forgetfulness !
I look on thee with Adam's eyes
And find thee good, and name and bless.
Yet it is true that as it grows
Familiar, named, a spirit goes
Softly away like dew from a rose.
That look of thee that strangely smiled
Has grown familiar — wine and bread
For something lost ! Where has it fled ?
Plain folk about, woman and child,
Where there were splendors ! Ah, who knows ?
Named, named ! But not to be beguiled !
And this, the sweet, if I should name it,
Not such again might I reclaim it !
Oh, whyfore with a word defame it ?

Poor me, that needs must phrase a bliss !
Again — again ! Oh, what is this ?

Wait — I remember ! 'T is a —

Nay !

So small a word and flown away !

Strange sweet, that seemeth to have wings !
 What infinite swift flutterings
 Are in it ! Ah, but how it stings !
 But speak it not, for then grown wise,
 Knowledge must come to blind my eyes
 And I shall lose the great first-breath,
 First-look, first-love ! As if one saith,
 " These things, once told, must suffer death."
 Names flash like swords before my eyes,
 An Eve that wants her Paradise.

Eve, Eve — that needs must pluck a fruit
 So to get knowledge ! What is this ?
 Wait, I remember ! 'T is a —

Nay !

So small a word and flown away.

Swift is it on my lips and brow.
 Beneath it verily I seem

To dream !

A moment ? Hours ? Years ?
 These all are in it and the spheres
 Are not more perfect. Nay, nor tears !

Oh, many folk am I — their times
Blow through me and their loves, their fears.
Who touched me then ?

It was I, Adam, touched thee, Eve.

Love, love, I could not well believe.

But Thou, that ever smilest so ?

I am that one that needs must go

From thy lips, Judas.

Be it so.

Oh, break the spell and give the name

Or I am broken for love and shame

And glory of it !

Peace : be still.

I guess thee, sweet ! Lay by thy wings,

Lose thy dear marvels, pleasures, stings,

And be of these quaint human things

One of the dearest. Be to me

A caged wild bird that never sings.

Be human, foolish, fond, for so

I'll have the speech to tell !

But oh,

For the fleet wings that come and go,

The swift delight, terror, and woe !

I do remember. What is this ?

Wait — Nay, but speak it —

'T is a kiss.

THE SONS OF CAIN

God that we serve with blood, how long
Shall the old debt remain ?
How long shall we to soothe Thy lust
Present Thee with our slain ?
Lo, our hearts break from day to day
Who are the sons of Cain.

This earth begets a living fruit
To him that laboreth.
He brought its innocence, its smiles,
Its sweet and pleasant breath.
In paradise this might have been,
But Thou didst ask for death.

He had not thought to slay the lambs
That played about his knee.
He did not know a wounded kid
Was a sight so fair to see,
Nor that the blood of trembling hinds
Would seem so good to Thee.

But since Thou wouldst have blood, behold !
And yet Thou art not stayed,

For we have slain each man his brother
And made Thy beasts afraid.
And thy good earth has sweat with blood.
Lord, Lord, art Thou not paid ?

We serve Thee to the ends of earth
Obedient to Thy word ;
We blow the scattered folk like chaff,
The lightning in our sword ;
For still we feel amid our flesh
The whirlwind of the Lord.

The restless peoples that flared forth
Have flickered out alone ;
For as the fire consumes the flax
Our breath did fall thereon.
Thy flame is in our mouths, O God,
Thy fires are in our bone.

And still our shameful tribe drives on,
Made alien from our birth,
And in our laughter there are tears
And crying in our mirth,
And when we till the soil we raise
Old dead men from the earth.

As once I housed me with my kin
And sweetly there would bide,
I kissed my brother, knowing well
The thing that would betide.
I slept at night upon his breast,
Yet by my hand he died.

We spoke that night of pleasant things,
Our souls were clean and fair,
And the sharp bliss of angel's wings
Was round us in the air,
When that old thought must raise its head
Out of a hidden lair.

And when that thought had raised its head,
The room seemed strangely bright.
The books, the walls, stood sharply forth
As in a different light.
My brother's face was not the same,
I could not bear the sight.

And once he whispered in the night,
"Brother, I have a fear,"
And I replied, who knew the end,
"Sleep thou, for I am here."
And thrice he whispered, drawing close,
"O Brother, be thou near."

And thrice he quavered in the dark,
 "Art thou not near?" he said.
"Ay, close at hand," I answered. "Sleep,
 And be thou comforted."
And well I wot that this was so,
 Knowing that he was dead.

And all night long his silent face
 Did cleave the dark in twain,
And by that constant light I prayed
 With babbling tongue and vain.
By such strange tapers do they pray
 That are the sons of Cain.

And as he lay with arms outstretched
 So straight on either side,
He looked as gaunt as any cross
 Whereon a man has died,
And to that awful cross I clung
 Where he was crucified.

Out through the fog the great north sun
 Flared red at break of day,
And where the level ice floes run
 Was white and black and gray,
And twenty men went from our ship,
 And all went forth to slay.

For man is lord of all that is
In earth and sea and sky,
And there is never a gentle thing
But that it needs must die.
So all our ways are tracked with blood
And blood they know us by.

And we would kill the wistful seal
That bode in simple-wise.
The mother feared me not, but took
The blow in mute surprise,
While her young seal looked up at me
With great tears in its eyes.

The crying of that little seal
Was like a child in need.
Pity was on me and I wept
That I should do that deed,
But still the want in me cried out,
And so I let it bleed.

It looked at me with gentle eyes,
I would have turned away.
God, Thy desire in me was strong
That I must needs obey.
Since Thou didst give the lust for blood,
What could I do but slay?

And swift the great north fog drove down
And found me there alone.
Its strange white bulwarks walled me round
That were more stout than stone.
And the dead seal stared up at me
With eyes that met my own.

The fog against my lips was cold
As the bodies of dead men.
I thought I kissed a murdered thing
That wallowed in a fen.
I spat the taste out of my mouth
And found it there again.

And strange as death the great north fog
Swept down the great ice floe.
It shut me in from sight and hid
The roads where I might go.
The cold was in my brain and bone
And I was vague and slow.

But at my feet the little seal
Did save me, being dead.
The wound about its piteous heart
Was gaping wide and red.
I plunged my hands in its warm breast,
And so was comforted.

O Christ, whose flesh inclined to bear,
So must it ever be.
It was the life of that dead seal
That warmed the life in me.
I clung about its bleeding breast
As if it had been Thee.

Lord Christ, whose flesh inclined to bear
That Thou mightst ease our pain,
With this poor seal, mid snow and ice,
Behold, how art Thou slain ;
For still our need is all for blood
Who are the sons of Cain.

She that I love all dearness has,
All wisdom in her eyes.
With her fair hands she keeps my soul
In its first Paradise.
Her large looks cleanse my thoughts as dawn
Makes perfect the dim skies.

She knows that when I die, her heart
Is the Heaven where I go,
That through her eyes I look on God
And through her thoughts I know.
Yet once I said, " My weary love,
What burden grieves thee so ? "

Now God had wrought a Paradise
Where we might always be,
And well she knows for love of her
My soul is good to see.
“A broken heart,” she said, “Dear Love,
That got a wound from thee.”

For there's never a man that loves a woman
But breaks her heart in twain.
Yet will she smile with pitying eyes,
Knowing it not in vain,
For men must wound before they love,
That are the sons of Cain.

God that we serve with blood, we take
Our hearts betwixt our hands
And rend them surely that they break,
Obeying Thy commands,
And all the years are stained with red
And red is on the lands.

O Christ, whose flesh inclined to bear
That Thou mightst ease our pain,
There is a long and bitter road
That lies betwixt us twain,
For Thou wouldst save but we must kill,
Who are the sons of Cain.

Thou art not of us, though Thy wounds
Were hard for thee to keep.
Thou hast not known the wounds of sin
That sink so sure and deep.
Beside the grief that lies in them
Thy woe is kind as sleep.

Thou art not of us, for Thy hand
Has bruised no piteous thing.
If Thou hadst killed, but once, in thought,
Thou hadst known sorrowing.
But one may taste Gethsemane,
Yet still escape the sting.

Thou didst not drink the wine of life,
Although Thy wine was red.
Thou didst not eat the bread of life,
Though bitter was Thy bread.
Thou didst not feel the death of sin,
Only Thy flesh was dead.

Dear Heart of Christ, it is not Thou
That bears for us the blame,
But Judas knows the love, the want,
The woe through which we came,
And Judas with the eyes like ours
Has drunk our cup of shame.

They say that John did love Thee most.

I say it was not so,

But he that with a broken heart

Kissed Thee and let Thee go.

For I, whose flesh is wrought like his,

I know, Lord Christ, I know.

The wounds upon Christ's hands and feet

Hold no such balm for me.

Judas, thy breast shall give me rest

With heart pierced utterly.

If thou hast trod the roads to God

Then might I go, with thee.

And God looked down. About His throne

Strong winds of angels blow,

But He heard the wailing of the tribes,

And a woman's heart beat low,

And He heard the crying of the seal

Upon the great ice floe.

And Christ looked down from His high Heaven,

Deep and serene, and smiled.

And Judas with the eyes like ours

Stood near Him, undefiled.

He leaned his head on the breast of Christ

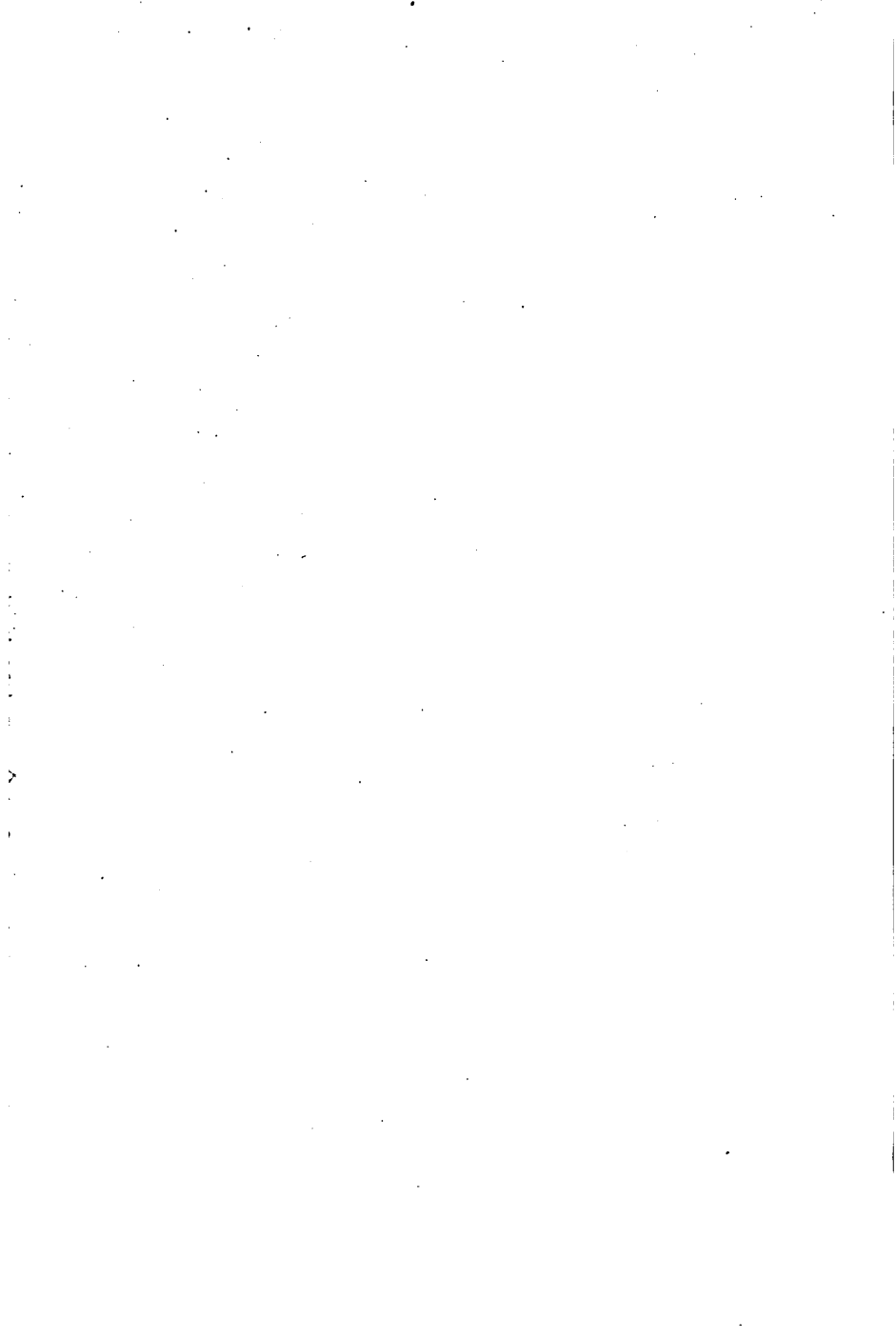
Like any wistful child

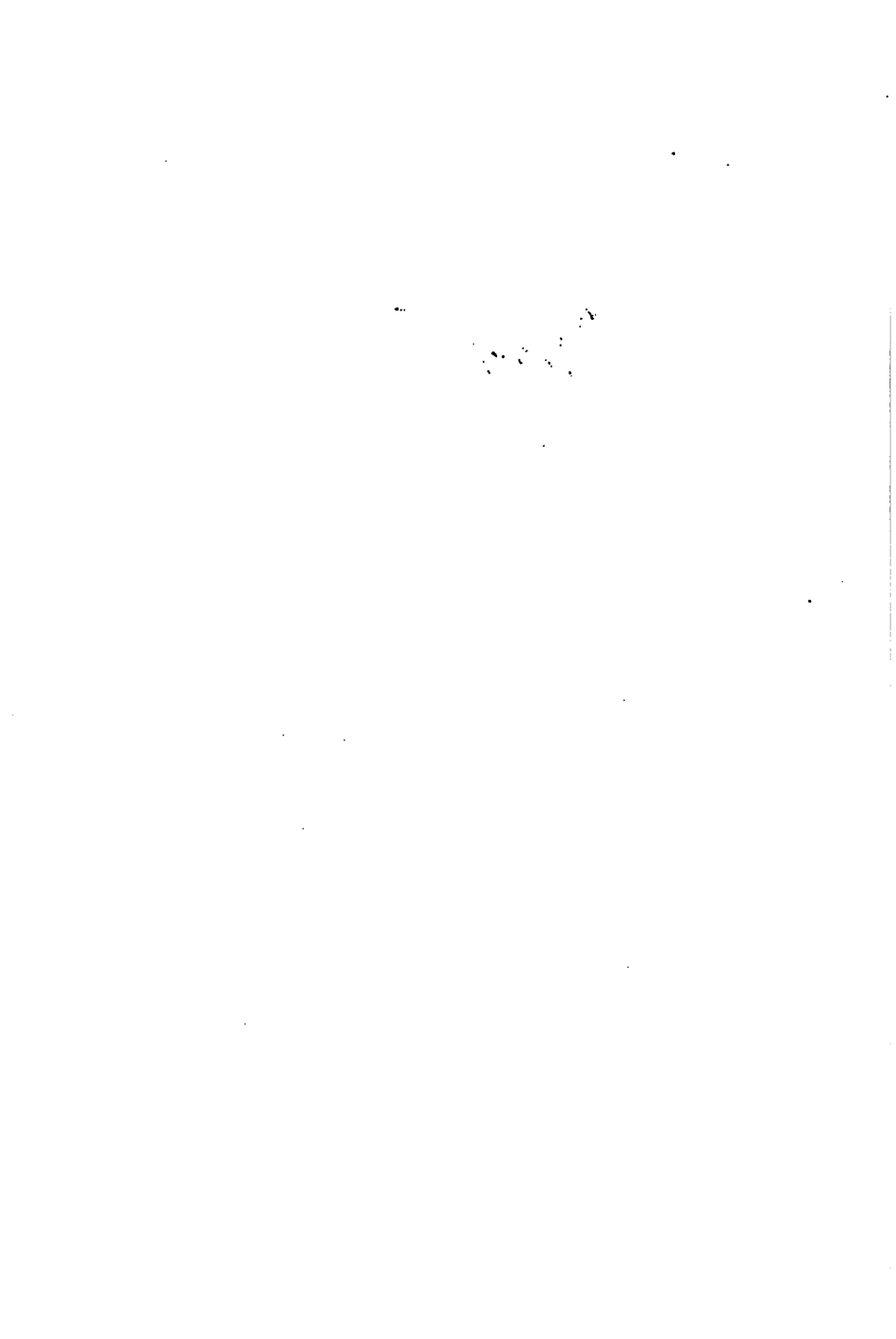
For of that one we hurt, we learn
 Forgiveness from its eyes.
Since only Death could teach us love
 By Death we shall grow wise.
We know not why — but only those
 That are the Sacrifice.

For there is a love surpassing woman's
 That lies betwixt those twain.
It was born out of a stricken heart
 And fathered upon pain,
The strange great love that surely grows
 'Twixt the Slayer and the Slain.

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